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ABSTRACT

As background information for a discussion of India's communication system and its potential for social change, this paper briefly describes the country's physical characteristics, some of its cultural heritage and demographics, and the development of its education and railways. After a discussion of the folk media (traditional changes) of communication, the paper focuses on the cinema, radio, and television to provide a holistic approach to the mosaic nature of India's communication facilities. Two cases are used to illustrate the experimental nature of India's communications efforts: (1) the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), which was the precursor to later satellite communication efforts and which served as a pilot project mainly for educational purposes; and (2) Kerala State, which demonstrates the fusing of native ingenuity with communications technology. Use of video as a communication tool is explored, and the Open University and the country's media policy are analyzed. A plea is made for India's media to be run professionally and with social responsibility. (CGD)

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THE INDIAN MEDIA SCENARIO

K E EAPEN

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THE INDIAN MEDIA SCENARIO

-- K. E. Eapen

Introduction

Recent decades have headlined the many deliberations of the less developed countries or the Commonwealth of Nations. In such groupings, the magnitude of problems of a country such as India gets lost. We read about a Nassau without realising that is has a population only of 9,000 or so (half of whom are foreigners), whereas India has as many people as the 48 other Commonwealth countries put together. In addition to population and physical dimensions, there are others such as religion. India has given birth to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism; it has barboured Judaism, Christianity and Islam from very early times. Therefore, while culture and diversity cannot be ignored. Two important national segments, education and railways, are mentioned later to indicate the strides being made.

This paper attempts to present a brief physical introduction before touching upon the country's traditional channels of communication. Then the print, cinema, radio and television are taken in succession. These media are not handled in the same fashion, as the intention is to provide a holistic approach to the mosaic nature of communication facilities than an identical narration about each. Two isolated cases, those of SITE and Kerala State, are described in some detail to show the experimental nature of communication efforts. SITE offers the technology options, whereas Kerala reflects indigenous possibilities. Sandwiching these are Video, Open University and Media Policy.

The continuing strand is about media's potential role in social change. The role of people's participation was recognized over 35 years ago, not that it has been enthusiastically acted upon. The First Five-Year Plan document, 1951-56, in

its Chapter VIII on "Public Cooperation in National Development" had a section on 'Reaching the People' which said inter alia: "A widespread understanding of the Plan is an essential stage in its fulfillment. An understanding of the priorities which govern the Plan, will enable each person to relate his or her role to the larger purposes of the nation as a whole. All available methods of communication have to be developed and the people approached through the written and spoken word, no less than through radio, film, song and drama. Above all, steps have to be taken to provide literature and information for the people in simple language and on a scale equal to the needs of the country."

It went on to add: "It is only in terms of local programmes that local leadership and enthusiasm can play their part. The Plan has to be carried into every home in the language and symbols of the people and expressed in terms of their common needs and problems with the assistance of creative writers and artists, which has to be specially enlisted. If obstacles are encountered and things go wrong anywhere, it would be helpful in every sense if information is imparted candidly and the people are acquainted with the steps being taken to set things right. It is an error to belittle the capacity of the common man to find out and accept what is good for improvement."

Apparently, the document recognised the need for decentralisation and localisation of information, and for feedback. Sadly, like many other documents, this had by and large remained paper guides, as we may taste from the following pages.

Indian Macrocosm

The macrocosm that India is needs to be appreciated for a clear understanding of the media scenario of the sub-continent.

India is the seventh largest country in the world, populationwise next only to China. It has a distinct geographical entity, as it is well marked off from

the rest of Asia. Bounded by Himalaya on the north, it tapers southwards into the Indian Ocean. On the east is the Bay of Bengal and on the west, the Arabian Sea.

Encompassing 3,287,263 sq. kms., from north to south it stretches 3,214 kms. and east to west, 2,933 kms. While its land frontier is about 15,200 kms., the coastline embraces 7,516 kms. To the north are China, Nepal and Bhutan, and in the northwest Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Gulf of Mannar and Balk Straits separate India from Sri Lanka. Burma and Bangaladesh are to the east.

The mainland has four well-defined regions: the great mountain zone, plains of Ganges and Indus, the desert region and the southern peninsula. The Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghana basin is the largest of river systems receiving waters from an area comprising about a quarter of the total area of the country. Indian climate may broadly be described as tropical monsoon, though it ranges from torrid to arctic. Drought and floods can co-exist here.

Great civilisations have existed on river banks such as the Indus Civilisation. Some continue, as in the Gangetic belt. Through srutis and smritis the Vedic culture has continued for some five millennia. The ancient communication channels still remain a force. An estimated seven million devotees, for example, gathered at Hardwar on the Ganges during March-April, 1986, for the khumbh mela where the loudspeakers and videos were as much a part of the communication activities as the traditional sadhus walking amidst milling crowds.

Now, the khumbh mela is not exactly a religious event alone. A news item circulated on April 10th by the Press Trust of India read: "You will certainly not miss them. They might even outnumber the multitude that has descended on Hardwar. No crossing or eye-catching spot or an electric or telegraph pole in the kumbh mela area there is without a banner or hoarding or a poster on child

survival and development, as part of a campaign launched by UNICEF...In keeping with the festival mood, the message is being disseminated through kathas and puppet shows as well as plays. A balloon swaying in the wind over Rodi Belwala exhorts the people to immunise their children, before they are 12 months old, against the vaccine-preventable diseases of diptheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, polio and measles. UNICEF is also spreading its message through leaflets to the pilgrims."

If physical distances and cultural heritage be one strand of the Indian situation, another could be the large population. The 1981 census showed 685 million people, an increase of 25% of the 1971 figure. This rise is not because of the high birth rate alone but because also of the fall in death rate brought about by better health conditions, effective control of epidemics, efficient handling of famine conditions, and general improvement and economic development.

The average density of population is 216 per sq. km. This varies from Kerala in the south (655 per sq. km.) to Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast (8) which affect the national media mosaic. It needs to be stressed that generalisations about "India" will be misleading and we need to take into account the variances among the many units that constitute the country. For example, if Uttar Pradesh (110.8 million in 1981) were a separate country, it would be the sixth largest in the world. Or, if nationally, there are more men than women, Kerala belies it with 1,032 women for 1,000 men there. We could take 36.2% as the literacy rate (1981 census), but a closer look will show that between males and females the figures are 46.9% 24.8% respectively.

The percentage of literates to total population in the two states we have been mentioning is as follows:

State	Literacy	Male	Female
Uttar Pradesh (UP)	27.16	38.76	14.04
Kerala	70.42	75.26	65.73

This shows the literacy divide between the two states, on the one hand. On the other, it shows also that the gap between literacy rates of men and women in Kerala are not significant compared to UP, or to the national figures where nearly half the males and three-fourths females are still illiterate. These get reflected in media consumption patterns.

As for languages, there are 15 specified in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution. The country is divided on linguistic basis. It comprises 22 States and nine Union territories.

India is a union of states, a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic, with a parliamentary system of government. Its constitution was adopted on 26th November 1949, coming into force on 26th January 1950. The fundamental rights provided in the constitution include the rights to freedom of speech and expression.

It may be relevant to mention here that India has the third largest concentration of scientists, next only the USA and USSR. The country claims a place among the top ten industrialised nations of the world. The progress India has made in satellite communication would not have been possible but for its own scientists and industrial backing.

One cannot enumerate all the developments of India in recent decades. Suffice to mention two: education and the railways. In 1951 India had 28 universities, 147 professional colleges, and 548 arts/science colleges, with a total enrolment of 174,000. The 1985 figures for these were 135 universities,

1,500 professional colleges, and 3,500 arts/science colleges showing a twenty-fold increase in enrolment: 3,442,000. Free India has treated expenditure on education as an investment which confers benefits to the nation because the productive capacity of the labour force is improved. It needs to be noted, however, that only a quarter of India's population has been touched by formal education. One criticism has been that the massive creation of people with higher education has been at the expense of primary education.

The school stream has over a hundred million pupils. Many millions drop out before the age of ten, adding to the backlog of illiterates. Could the mass media intervene in the classroom as well as outside to make better citizens of such vast numbers? The Indian dilemma is of facing the high-tech challenges on the one hand, and the task of providing basic levels of education for the masses, on the other. This raises basic questions in terms of social justice, especially after almost four decades of independence.

As for railways, it is one of the wonders of the world. Statistically, Indian railways cover 62,640 kms., and it carries over nine million passengers and 0.75 tonnes of freight daily. Its rolling stock consists of more than 10,000 locomotives, nearly 40,000 coaches and 400,000 goods wagons. It is the largest single employer, with 1,6 million persons.

The narrow gauge, the metre gauge and the broad gauge co-exist in India. There are coal, diesel and electric locos. The needs of expanding agricultural modernisation and industrial development are interwoven with the growth of railways. It is estimated that, at the peak harvest season, nearly 100 freight trains with 100 wagons each leave Punjab daily for various destinations. All these involve information and communication networks tapping computer facilities, microwave and satellite systems.

Though the emphasis of this paper is on human and social communication, it

is important to recognise its interface with the rest of the systems as they often overlap. For media Consumption, schooling is a desirable condition: for distribution of newspapers, magazines, feature films, etc. across vast distances, railways are a necessary condition.

Traditional Channels

The submerged, none the less effective, component of the Indian communication system is still the folk media or the traditional channels. Social communication does not happen in a cultural vacuum, especially in what are mainly rural societies. An ancient culture such as India's is an endless carrier of folk theatre, puppetry, story telling forms an other face-to-face means of communication. That Karnataka State from where this writer hails, has more than 200 musical forms--song for the morning of for the evening; song or marriage or for burial; song for sowing or for harvest; etc.-- and that Uttar Pradesh has over 2,000 festivals tell about the cultural expanse. Their communication significance is all the more importance when we recognise that the spread of modern and organised media is still confined to urban India and even in rural parts, they are the preserve of the literate local elites.

Some of the folk have survived centuries, both in content and style. Some have changed though their dominant characteristics continue. This rich reservoir is one of the greatest resources for reaching through cultural symbols the many sub-masses of this vast land. The audiences catered to by traditional channels are not diverse in cultural fabric as in the heteregensus audiences of technology-based new media.

Recognising the potential role of folk media as channels for informally educating the masses, the Government of India set up its Song and Drama Division in 1954. It organises many thousands of performances annually at the community level. Some 800 artists are employed by the Division and its regional offices on

a regular basis. In addition, there are over 400 previate registered folk troupes all over the country. These are commissioned to put up shows on various developmental themes. The appeal of the folk media is more emotional than intellectual. Therefore, they have been capable of inspiring, involving and motivating people into new thinking and action. Many private agencies resort to traditional channels for extension purposes. The revolutionary ideas of the freedom struggle were disseminated in significant manner through them during the first half of this century. Election campaigns heavily lean on them for better results.

The "flexible" among the performing arts have shown their ability to absorb given messages and relay them to intended audiences. Adult education, agricultural modernisation, nutrition, child care, and a host of similar concern have found expression through such media. While loaded with new and functional dimensions, they still retain their cultural roots as mirrors of people's values and traditions.

An area of worry is the impact of communication technology as it spreads its tentacles deeper into rural India. This may push and pull the folk media around whereby some may get strangled and mutilated, and some others irretrievably lost. Optimists maintain that the electronic media might ultimately help in the wider dissemination of folk art forms and thereby better appreciation and enrichment. Where intermarriage of the old and the new has been attempted, results have not always been positive because of the area specificity of some of the performing arts.

There are village functionaries of various kinds forming powerful links of the traditional communication networks. Scholars have identified three major kinds of them: (1) Local dignitaries such as religious heads, village teachers, leader of troupes and those who dispense indigenous medicines: (2) Functionaries

such as mid wife, money lender, barber, tailor and the like: and (3) Frequent village visitors such as the postman, hawker, and seller of vegetables, fruits, etc.

While the novelty of SITE may overwhelm rural viewers to the point that the content gets lost, age-old folk media and traditional functionaries continue to retina their credibility.

In the historical context of the means of communication, the Indian press is a new comer. Social communication, as we have seen, had preceded printing facilities via cultural networks. Once the print channel arrived, it joined the main stream with our replacing other media, and have co-existed with film and radio-TV which followed. The language dimension in Indian communications is of special significance. Let us examine it in the context of the press.

The MacBride Commission, in its 1980 report to the UNESCO, stated that there are over 3,500 languages globally. The Indian Census of 1981 lists 1,652. Among world's 16 languages, each spoken by more than 50 million people each, are Bengali, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. Daily newspapers in India appear in 20 languages, periodicals in another 65. The multiplicity of languages breed a host of problems. Some of these are rooted in the technology such as printing; some others are centred around translation.

India has nearly 20,000 publications of all kinds. Of these 1,334 were daily newspapers (1982), with a combined circulation exceeding 50 million copies. The single major source of information about the print medium is Press in India (Annual Report of the Registrar of Newspapers in India). It usually appears two years behind and the details which follow are based on the 27th report which appeared in 1983, offering 1982 data. According to it the number of papers had grown three-fold since 1961. As the broad recent trends remain more of less the same, the following is reflective of general patterns.

The Hindi press led all other languages, both in number and in circulation. English remained second, both in number and circulation. English, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Urdu had more than 100 dailies each. Out of a total circulation of 14.85 million copies a day, Hindi accounted for 3.8 million (25.6%) and English, 3.1 (19.4%). Other languages claiming more than a million circulation each day were Bengali, Malayalam and Marathi. Figures like these could be misleading in the sense that, if generalisations were attempted in the European context without distinguishing between Iceland and Italy or between Norway and Netherlands, correct picture is not likely to emerge. The English press in India means some kind of national circulation whereas the Hindi press in will mean only Bihar, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP. Malayalam press, however, is limited just to Kerala. If the population involved were to be analysed, we end up with Kerala's 25.4 million and UP alone with 110.8 million. Then, there are questions of varying literacy rates and infrastructural variations.

There are other possible pitfalls if one were to beentirely dependent on Press in India. While the annual mentions Malayala Manorama Weekly of Kottayama as the largest circulated periodical in the country, 1986 circulations indicate Mangalam, again of Kottayam, as the leader in the field with 1.4 million copies. This is high even by Western standards. Mangalam's readership is school and collge girls, and employed women. It is written in a racy style and deals with issues and feelings of concern to a largely literate and young readership. This is achieved through half-a-dozen serialised novels which appear each week. This, we have steady patterns and profiles of publications in some areas, along with rapidly changing pockets elsewhere.

The Press Registrar's annual reports have consistently said that nearly 95% of the circulation of Indian dailies is limited to the metropolitan cities of

Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras, and the State capitals. There are, however, significant variations as represented by Kerala (1.44 million copies) whereas Kashmir at the northern tip of the country does not have even a single daily. Or if one were to take all kinds of periodicals, the combined circulation for Hindi, English and Malayalam are 13.8 million, 9.7 million and 4. 5 million respectively. The potential readership for English and Malayalam are only around 25 million each, while Hindi claims ten time that. Similarly, when some states publish only in two or three languages, both Delhi and Tamil Nadu have publications in 14 out of the 16 principal languages of the country. Mizoram and Meghalaya publications are confined only to English.

The concentration of the English press is in the four metropolitan cities. Hindi publications, by and large, are an urban phenomenon of the Hindi belt. But Malayalam papers reach every nook and corner of that thickly populated Kerala state. It is customary for Kerala homes to subscribe for a specialised magazine such as woman's weekly, in addition to a general one. Certain standardisation in written Malayalam (including script reformation) has happened since the 1950s which is not true in the case of Hindi.

If one were to look into the ownership pattern, individuals account for 13, 157 publications; societies and associations for 3,310; firms and partnerships, 979; joint stock cos., 806; and state/central governments, 605. The major common ownership units were: Bennett Coleman * Co. with 15 news interest publications (1.782 million copies) and 17 non-news publications (0.929 million); Express Newspapers with 31 news interest (1.136 million and 5 non-news (0.250 million); and Ananda Bazar Patrika group (0.209 million). Individual ownership and ownership by joint stock cos. had a share of 76.5% of the total circulation of all periodicals combined.

Over 40% of the 50 million copies were devoted to news/current affairs (11.3

million copies) and literary/cultural (10 million).

When the First Press Commission (1954) reported, the total circulation of dailies was around 2.5 million copies, compared to over an estimated 15 million at present. With the increase in literacy, the improved capacity awareness, etc., circulations are climbing. Yet they are not commensurate with the literates of various linguistic populations. In a state like Kerala, political polarisation has led to party papers and the faithfuls eagerly look each morning to their mouthpieces. This tilt is visible in other southern states as well.

When Edwin A. Hirschmann (affiliated to the Journalism Department, Hislop College, Nagpur, 196061) looked in to the problems of the press in a multi-lingual city like Bombay, he found that dailies come out there in nine languages. Speech reporting, the burden of the dailies in those days, created problems. English, Hindi, Marathi or Gujarati speakers could no always get through to many of the reporters for linguistic reasons -- the reporters not necessarily competent in all of them and lacking ability to created similar hurdles. At the desk, translation was another difficulty. U.S. or Japanese newsman, not even reporters of Bangladesn or Indonesia, have to cope with such riddles arising out of linguistic diversity embedded in India.

There were Bombay publishing houses which brought out dailies in more than one language. It was the English edition which employed most of the reporters and they gave master copies in English. All the wire services during early 1960s were in English; so also most of the press releases whether they came from the Government of India, state governments, commercial houses or various embassies and consulates. This could be contrasted with the Kerala situation where, except for the Indian Express (Cochin edition), all the papers appear in the local language. The Indian Express, Cochin is sometimes described as a Malayalam paper in English language, reflective of its cultural complexion. For the Kerala

press, most stories are originally written in Malayalam and the Bombay situation does not exist. From a social angle, almost all Cochin journalists are Malayalees, whereas the press corps in Bombay is composed of the many sub-cultures of India.

Be it print, film or radio-TV, language is one of the blessings or courses of the sub-continent, depending on how one wants to look at this Babel of interlocking and mutual dependencies. For effective localised communication, there is nothing like the local language on its dialect.

India is unlikely to have a single language comparable to French in France or Japanese in Japan. While plurality of languages does not lead to national cohesion, choice of a "link" language becomes a source of national strain as typified in countries as different as Belgium, Canada or India. This problem has been plugged elsewhere by opting for the colonial tongue, as in Zambia. Dominance of English or Hindi could lead to discrimination at the national level, and dominance of the local language within linguistic states to hierarchies. In a multilingual situation, the beneficiaries will be those who can handle many languages. The millions who do not understand English/Hindi or the language of the linguistic state will be discriminated against for communication purposes by the linguistically powerful.

Cinema

The Times of India, Bombay, carried an advertisement on July 7, 1896, which read: "The marvel of the century, the wonder of the world." Lumiere Brothers' cinematographic exhibition had thus arrived in India. Rural touring cinemas began operating by the end of 1920s, and continue to the present times. The first talkie to be screened in India was "The Melody of Love" Universal Picture) in 1929. The first Indian talkie, "Alam Ara," was made in 1931. Within five

decades India turned out to be the largest feature film producer in the world, feeding a faithful though not demanding audience.

The medium has been Indianised to a great extent. It has grown roots in to the Indian ethos and has merged in to the national social fabric. Despite technical and production sophistication, its dream-world nature persists. Vast production centres have emerge in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, though there is only a single unit for raw stock manufacture (Hindustan Photo Films). The exhibition points, ranging from air-conditioned and escalator-provided slick city theatres to travelling rural cinema, are under 12,000. Half of these are in the four southern states and Maharashtra, to the west.

References to "Indian" cinema are usually about the Hindi film industry. Both the S.K. Patil Film Enquiry Committee (1951) and the K.S. Karanth Committee (1980) found the sickness of the film enterprise is due to lack of a sound organisational base, rank individualism and indiscipline. Today, a powerful regional cinema is a reality. Many state governments have come forward with incentives and financial support for regional production. On the one hand is the commercial, free enterprise film business often accused of the star system, formula film and black money. On the other hand is the National Film Development Corporation and other support to promote "good cinema."

There are strong regional cinema as in Bengal and weak ones as in neighbouring Orissa. Many of the minor north Indian language cinema, such as Punjabi or Kashmiri, have problems vis-avis the major Hindi filmdom. This at least in theory means that the weaker segments may have to compromise with government requirements to claim loans and subsidies. Further, issues of self-regulation and public accountability make demands on the part of an enterprise deemed in principle to be free and independent.

If one were to look to Europe, the Industrial Revolution had laid the

foundation for a growing rational approach affecting various facets of life including art. When cinema was invented, it developed in that climate. The technology of film making came to India in a difference environment. However, the aroma of freedom struggle was already in the air. Cinema did not directly respond in political terms but it did deal with social evils. Later, the national aspirations got reflected. After Indian independence the shift has been to cheap and at time vulgar entertainment with the thrust on box office economics.

The large scale postwar migration of villagers to urban centres disturbed the centuries-old value systems engraved in Indian consciousness. There were problems of joint families breaking into nuclear ones. Cinema stepped city dwellers. Some of the themes of the moving images got built around caste and class, family responsibilities, pre-arranged marriages and the role of women.

Women got selectively portrayed and projected in a manner that images tended to legitimise the contradictions of the claimed and real status of Indian womanhood. The net result was not complimentary to the modern, resulting in reinforcement of the status quo, of the outmoded.

As for the political impact of the movies, two southern states are usually referred to: Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Like President Reagan, the Chief Ministers of both these states are from the silver screen. Regional cinema, as it evolved in Tamil Nadu during the past half century, for example, aimed at reaching the masses at large and not the elites. Some of the values propagated were aimed at highlighting the superiority of Tamil language and attacking the caste system where the Brahmin minority appeared to have all the plums. The film provided a powerful forum for political articulation.

All India Radio (Akashvai)

The pioneers of broadcasting in India, as in many countries, were amateurs

such as YMCA radio clubs. Some of these were as old as 1924. All India Radio came on the scene much later. Regular, uninterrupted broadcasting by the Government of India, then called Indian State Broadcasting Service, began only on 5th May 1932. Fillip for it came from Lionel Feilden of the B.B. C. who took over as controller of Broadcasting in 1935. On June 8, 1936, the broadcasting service was renamed All India Radio (A.I.R.). Fielden did much to expand the network and provide healthy traditions of broadcasting.

On the eve of Indian independence, A.I.R. had a network of nine stations. Partition of the sub-continent left India with six stations, excluding Aurangabad, Baroda, Hyderabad, Mysore and Trivandrum, which were located in the princely states. The name "Akashvani" then belong to the radio facility of Mysore State.

Slow and steady progress was made during the various Five-Year Plan periods so much so A.I.R.'s 90 stations now cover more than 90% of the population and 80% of the area. Structurally, broadcasting is generally patterned after the B.B.C., including the Director, Audience Research. On the top of the heap is the Director-General who is a civil servant under the Union Ministry of INformation and Broadcasting.

If there were only some 3.600 licensed sets in 1927, the number had grown to about 276,000 by 1947. Thirty-five years later, during 1981-82, he figure stood at over 10 million receivers. This is, however, not indicative of the actual number because it has been argued that, with the transistor revolution, there are as many unlicensed sets as there are licensed ones. Now that the licensing system has been scrapped, estimates seem to indicate the presence of almost 50 million sets. This is not all that impressive in a nation of over 135 million families. The joint family system, listening habits in the homes of friends and neighbours, community sets, etc. would imply a much larger listenership than what the number

of sets would indicate.

The principal ingredients of the programme put out by A.I.R. are music, talks, discussions, interviews, plays and features, documentaries, educational broadcasts, services for specific groups such as farmers, industrial workers, youth, tribals, armed forces, and women and children. Audience research had repeatedly shown that news and Indian film music are the most sought after. Radio plays come next in popularity. Sports news and commentary which are much wanted in urban areas have less following in the countryside. More recent surveys indicate that, with the expansion of television, listenership especially for radio news has dwindled.

When the Central News Organisation came into being in 1937, A.I.R. used to broadcast just five news bulletins daily. The news Wing now puts out 254 bulletin daily for a duration of 35 hours in Home, External and Regional services. There are 68 national bulletins in 19 languages in the Home Service form Delhi, 123 regional bulletins in 60 languages and dialects, and 63 bulletins in 24 languages in the External Services.

There are many criticisms about the quality of A.I.R.'s news distribution. One is that it is civil servants and not professionals who collect and process news, people who might as well be working in the Publications Division or the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity. As these are Central Information Service personnel, their orientation is towards pleasing the bosses. Being part of the government machinery, other limitations crop up. For example, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was shot and killed, A.I.R. was slow on the story; even Mr. Rajiv Gandhi had to tune in B.B.C. on his Calcutta-New Delhi flight to know of the happenings. Yet another handicap of centralised national news in various languages is that the master copy, prepared in English and written as if for a daily, suffers in translation and lack of target audience slants. Further, there

is a Delhi-centric approach in the whole exercise of news dissemination.

A peep into the External Services shows that a start was made in reaching other countries during the war years. There was a mistaken belief during the early years of independence that the foreign broadcasts had outlived their usefulness. Some of the resources earmarked for external services were even diverted for domestic broadcasting. The situation has since been remedied. Now some 65 news bulletins in 25 languages plus a variety of programmes including music and commentaries on current affairs are beamed outward. An appreciation of the specificity of foreign audiences is still to sink into the system. Also, it is not unusual that there is a lack of coordination between the broadcast authorities and those responsible for framing and implementing foreign policies so much so optimum results are not obtained on the increasing investments on the outside broadcasts.

One of the most popular domestic items is of Vivdh Bharati (All India light variety programme) started on 3rd October 1957, a programme mainly of film music. It is broadcast for 12 hours and 45 minutes on weekdays and 13 hours and 15 minutes on Sundays and holidays, from 31 centres including two high power short wave transmitters located in Bombay and Madras. It went commercial on 1st November, 1967.

Of the many special audience broadcasts is the one beamed to rural audiences. Writing in the Asiatic Review, H.R. Hardinre said as early as April 1939 that in a country "such as India, vast in extent, with inadequate means of communication and a population mostly agricultural, largely illiterate ignorant, backward and poor, the benefit likely to accrue in the course of time from an efficient broadcasting service would be even greater than in Western countries, where the average standard of facilities and knowledge is high". Poverty prevented many villagers from owning radio sets.

One way out was to organise community listening. This a 1954 scheme, under which the Government of India met 50% of the cost and the rest provided by State Governments, was introduced. During February 9 - April 26, 1956 the Radio Rural Forum (RRF) scheme was experimented in five districts of Maharashtra. A.I.R.'s Poona station broadcast 20 special RRF programmes of 30 minutes each on Sundays and Thursdays. The forum members were expected to listen to them, discuss before and after the broadcasts, give their views and suggestions, and raise queries to be answered in subsequent programmes.

The success of the RRF project led to its countrywide use from 17th November 1959. This listening-cum-discussion-cumaction group programme provided a two-way contact between the broadcaster and the listener. As its operations spread, its functioning got diluted in certain areas so much so evaluations about its effectiveness led to conflicting conclusions.

RRFs are now the responsibility of state governments. Almost all of A.I.R.s stations broadcast special programmed for rural listeners for 30 to 75 minutes daily, In addition, a daily broadcast of 45-55 minutes on hardcore agriculture is put out by 64 Farm and Home Units attached to selected radio stations. Another innovation is the "Farm School on the AIR" providing instruction and guidance on farming, broadcast from more than 30 stations.

Improvement in the quality of life of the masses and the transistor revolution have changed radio ownership patterns in certain rural parts of the country. As habits die hard with bureaucracy, programme philosophy and content seem to remain generally the same in communication support to national development.

With the coming of television, glamour for rural metamorphosis seems to be snifting in favour of the new "audio-visual" medium. Problems arising out of the use of TV for development are taken up later.

Television (Doordarshap)

It is to the credit of Jawaharlal Nehru that he showed no special love for the post-war medium of television. Politically, he did not need "visibility". There were national priorities other than that of another entertainment medium.

Almost by chance an experimental Tv transmitter got planted in Delhi in September 1959. its programmes were intended purely for educational purposes. Some 300 schools within the national capital and less than a hundred neighboring rural communities were to benefit from the new medium. The entire clientele for the half-hour, twice-weekly service was thus about 400 sets.

This was put under the protective wing of Akashvani. The civilian top brass in the broadcasting structure maintained that television was just adding pictures to radio. This fantasy was at its highest during the SITE, 1975-76, when except for bits of school programmes originating from the temporary Bombay studio of the Space Applications Centre, everything was churhen out by the bureaucratic A.I.R.-TV. Till commercialism took over, this smugness continued.

The Chrysalis state of television lasted till 1965. It began to serve the interests of the ruling class. Antennae reportedly even got erected in certain posh homes which had no receiving sets. That was the ultimate status symbol.

Independence Day 1965 saw the regular daily Delhi Service. It was Gandhi Javanti, 1972, before the elite medium spilled over to Bombay, India's Hollywood. If television came to Bombay, it could not be kept our of Calcutta (1973) or Madras (1075). Thus the floodgates were slowly opened. For political reasons, the freak in this rat race was Srinagar, Kashmir (1973); a city like Bangalore, the electronic capital of India, had to wait another decade.

The colour painting of the Frankenstein monster was tried with Asiad, 1983. Customs duties were reduced for imported sets. Transmitters proliferated with unequalled speed, at one stage almost one new low power transmitter (LPT) a day.

Once a microphone was available on the Delhi platform, creating loud-speakers elsewhere tuned easy. INSAT helped multiply the same voice. By the end of 1985, the tally was 180 transmitters, but interestingly only 14 studio centres. This meant better provision for centralised signals with little improvement of local programme facilities.

Tall claims of 70% mass reach were made while evidence showed that nearly half the receiving sets were in Delhi and Bombay. Another estimated 40% were in State capitals and some district headquarters. The haphazard way TV stumbled on from 1959 to 1985 indicates that no policy was involved in this growth. Less than six million Indian sets compared to over 50 million receivers in China is not really any kind of explosion. The number by the end of the VIIth Plan, 1985-90, is to be 30 million sets.

Another aspect of this turn of events is that there were definite policies on the hardware represented by satellite technology and its supporting systems, but there was no comparable planning in terms of software, or programme content. INSAT suddenly provided large chunks of telecast time. Only then did those responsible for filling TV slots awaken to the input dilemma.

It is not that Indian television, separated from A.I.R.-TV and christened Doordarshan on April 1, 1976, alone faltered. When the University Grants Commission (UGC) was given two hours daily, five days a week for the "countrywide classroom" over TV, it found the bonanza difficult to cope with. There were, though, enough advance suggestions to the UGC from its Panel on Communication to quickly set up half-a-dozen educational production centres in various regions of the country. When belated steps were taken, most of such centres got established in the north.

To these should be added the cliche that began to be current in 1959 and has been going right into the first half of this decade: India is a poor country, we

are going in for an expensive medium such as television to "improve the quality of lift of the masses." Yet another claim was that Doordarshan would serve up a "judicious mixture of information, education and entertainment." Indian TV, however, remained a conduit for cinema products till the advertising agencies brought in the serials, even these essentially based on Bombay film culture.

While TV lobbyists had visions about the therapeutic powers of the new medium, more earth-based Indian ruralites had a different perception. This was reflected during the SITE study by the Department of Communication, Bangalore University. Villagers of Gulburga, Raichur and Bijapur of the Karnataka Cluster who had exposure to movies and broadcasts picturesquely described the new intruder, SITE< as "radio-cinema". This meant that they saw it as another medium of entertainment than a fresh educational black board.

While analysing the quantum of TV content, the galloping dominance of Hindi is obvious. This is true of those stations where programme production facility (often minimal) is available for local languages. The LPTsm worse off, have to put up with Delhi agricultural programmes, traffic arrangements or missing persons in the national capital. Studies show that, in the non-Hindi belt, not more than a third of the sets ar on for the culturally north-based Hindi fare.

Interspersing sponsored programmes and serials are consumer advertisements. Often the ads do not sell a product but values; some of the claims are of dubious nature. A product like bubble gum is not the most required in a nation where 70% of the primary schools are still single-teacher apologies.

Lack of TV policy itself may be a policy. It enables one Information Minister to assure that Doordarshan will not go commercial while his immediate successor, within months, opens the floodgates to jingles. It enables clinging on the black-and-white until an articulate and suave Minister converts the Prime Minister to colour. While discussions and debates are a-galore on educational

policy, little is heard about an information policy. India does not deserve the kind of television it has, making all the mistakes a hundred countries had committed before 1959.

Indian television was not set up for commercial purposes. But, having tasted blood (estimated income form advertising during 1986-87 is Rs.700 million), the consumerism-thrust is bound to continue. An investment of Rs.7,000 million is made for the five-year ending 1990 when Doordarshan would have made deeper inroads into rural areas via community sets.

As we discuss about various media, the lacuna of lack of proper recruitment and appropriate training of software personnel becomes evident. Two national institutions, the Indian Institute of Mass Communications (Delhi) and the Film & Television Institute (Pune), have been engaged mostly in refresher courses for the I & B Ministry staff. The 30 and odd journalism/communication departments occupy the slum area of the media metropolis. There is little of meaningful communication research to support better media functioning. Partly, British colonial educational heritage is responsible for this: partly, there is no eager clientele for better quality professionals. The press, generally under ownership of industrial houses, and the government, with its total control over radio-TV, are, for their own reasons, in no undue haste to attract some of the best human resources available for relevent communication purposes.

Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE)

SITE was the precursor to the efforts in satellite communication that were to follow. During an Indo-US agreement of 1969, it was agreed to lend for a year the American ATS-6. Accordingly, in 1975-76, SITE, which was conceived as a pilot project mainly for educational purposes, was launched. The experiment had both a formal and non-formal component. The former was for about half-an-hour of class room instruction for those in the 6-12 age group and the latter for two-

and-a-half hours of evening programmes for the mixed audiences of children and adults.

The experiment was focussed on rural audiences of six clusters spread widely over the country, catering to 2,400 possible community sets. This had tough logistic implications in terms of locating necessary villages with electricity supply, a building where the sturdy set could be kept, motorable roads, arrangements for maintenance and repairs, etc. More importantly, production of the desired kind of input, of which India did not have the supporting infrastructure, turned out to be the weakest link. There were questions of languages, including efforts at single video-double audio attempts.

The satellite functioned to near perfection and the ground system was maintained reasonably well, but the programmes generally were of poor quality. The thrust of the indo-US agreement was to try "audio-visual" communication in a situation, where majority of potential viewers would be illiterates, with a view to bring about behavioural changes in agricultural modernisation, family planning efforts, etc. From studies of viewers in the Karnataka Cluster it name to light, as stated earlier, that many perceived television as "radio-cinema" with its entertainment implication, and audiences were not awaiting "instruction" for change.

One of the findings from a national sample size of 17,000 was that majority of viewers of community TV were first generation consumers of a modern medium, viz. most of them were never exposed to print, film or broadcasting earlier. The experiment was limited to selected backward districts and the media poverty was to be anticipated. Lack of early exposure has implications for acculturation of a new medium before it could serve "instrumental" purposes. Ideawise and languagewise the experiment was conceptualised in urban terms, by elite experts who had little understanding of the rural sub-cultures they were catering to.

There were protracted benefits in certain pockets, especially to the mobile local rich farmer and the like: audience segments which could understand and act upon the messages delivered because of previous esposures through other media.

The Department of Communication, Bangalore University, held a meeting of expert on SITE evaluation, April 20-22, 1977 attended by most agencies involved wit the evaluatory exercise. The declared purpose of the meeting was to review and collate available SITE studies and findings, and based on them, to suggest guidelines for implementation by policy makers and planners. The guidelines were widely circulated then among men who mattered, by they ministers, bureaucrats, educationists, scholars or professionals. Like many SITE communication acts this too did not have intended effects. The guidelines dealt with communication policy, motivation, information load, multi-media approach, credibility, training and research, etc. Of the dozen guidelines, two are reproduced to show how relevant they are today as they were a decade ago:- Guideline1. On Policy for Future TV:

Television policy can be in terms of utilisation, strategies of the physical infrastructure (i.e.T.V. network, how many TV sets and where?), or in terms of programme production (local units, regional units, languages, etc.). It is recommended that:

(a) In view of the audio-visual nature of the medium which will have more effect on audiences, rural TV centres should be established taking into account the fact that rural audiences have limited access to media, and that they are, by and large, illiterates, and have limited exposure to the outside world due to poor transport and communication facilities;

(b) Since television-viewing in villages will continue to be mainly in the community viewing form for quite sometime to com, top priority should be made in central and state government budgets to ensure the installation and maintenance

of community TV sets in each local centre;

(c) Programmes produced for rural TV centres be of a localised nature, in view of the fact that the programmes of a general nature did not attract as large an audience as expected, and were not very effective in terms of catering to local needs of the audiences;

(d) The major thrust of rural Tv should be to reach underprivileged sectors;

(e) There should be proper co-ordination, both horizontal and vertical, among media, extension agencies, field publicity units and other rural development agencies; and

(f) In order to make programmes more useful, on-the-spot guidance and effective follow-up activities (demonstrations, supply of necessary inputs, etc.) should be taken up

Guideline 2. On Persudading and Motivating Viewers:

In order to persuade and motivate rural masses to view TV programmes regularly, it is recommended that:

(a) Programmes should be locally and functionally relevant based on the needs, aspirations and problems of the rural audiences:

(b) Rural TV programmed should be in local languages and where possible, in local dialects;

(c) There should be segmentation of programmes designed to suit specific needs and special interests of various categories of audiences, since their needs are varied. Segmentation should also be done area-wise, in cases where the programmes may not have universal appeal for the entire ara of coverage. When this is done, the name of the area for which a programme is specially designed should be mentioned during the telecast, and the concerned target audience agencies be informed ahead of the telecasts;

(d) In programme production, emphasis should necessarily be on outdoor (field-

based) items. Hardware should not become a constraint in producing field-based programmes. Also, production units should be adequately staffed. Lack of trained personnel should not be a constraint on programme production;

(e) TV centres should prepare schedules in consultation with a committee consisting of local officials, experts and users. Scheduling of TV programmes have been done in an arbitrary manner so far. Scheduling of programmes for each day should be done in such a manner as to strike a proper balance between instructional, informational and entertainment programmes; and

(f) Frequency of the same programmes or a different programme based on the same theme, should be carefully worked out after assessing audience reactions. A quick feedback is necessary to find out their viewing preferences, how often the themes should be repeated and whether the same programme should be shown again. This is in view of the fact that many programmes, both informational and entertainment were repeated to such a extent that viewers were annoyed with the repetition. 1

A recent survey of certain community TV centres of Andhra Pradesh districts, which are SITE continuity areas served by LPTs, showed displeasure by villagers at the increasing commercialisation of the medium. They wondered why items alien to their world such as soft drinks, aftershave lotions and detergents be repeated through loud and annoying jingles. After all, they said, rural people are not that stupid to deserve such partronising treatment; they could understand by one or two telecasts, if they be interested.

More than the rural people for whom the SITE was designed, it was a learning experience for the system operators of the project, be they engineers or social scientists. As the current INSAT series have shown, the programme production personnel are yet to gear up to the findings. Therefore, the scattering mechanism of INSAT-1B, currently operative, is Delhi-centric in approach and

increasingly consumeristic -- though the avowed goal of Doordarshan has been to "develop" the masses. There is increasing recognition about the limitations of this new medium as a change agent and also about the desirability of going "local" even through technological refinement of future communication satellites.

Video

If Doordarshan has turned out to be an alternate means of cinema-viewing without any immediate recurring cost for the family, friends and neighbors, the videocassette recorder has further privatised TV with the option of choice of time and film. VCRs appeared in India around the same time they did elsewhere, mainly among the neo-rich males interested in pornography or foreign programme.

More then half-a million VCRs are now under use in the country. Production of viewing of family and home made programmes have caught up with what video libraries are offering. Educational and training institutions are experimenting with the new communication tool; so also many video parlours and advertising firms. Video films have become the most sort out means of entertainment outside traditional movie houses. Where films are yet to reach, VCRs have made their inroads. If a "Rajiv's India" or the "New Delhi Times" -- two items withdrawn form Doordarshan -- are not to be on the national network, they become hot VCR material among urban elites.

Academic, business and training institutions are increasingly preferring VCRs to 16 microfilm projectors for "skill" and "information" transfer. Many government agencies are acquiring them. University faculties of education, extension and language are also resorting to them. Visual demonstrations through VCRs have caught up with industrial houses and business organisations.

Considering the illiterate component of the Indian population, VCRs may turn out to be the alternate all-purpose medium for localised purposes of instruction in such areas as agricultural development and family welfare.

Great ingenuity has into the production of "cultural cassettes" for Indians settled abroad. These include festivals, classical dances, papal visit to India, narration of epics, popular film songs, religious hymns with skillfully woven visuals, etc. There is an increasing indigenous market also for such items as the middle class is on the expanding path.

The decentralised video industry is entirely in the private sector. Large investments got attracted to it for quick returns. The element of domination by Hindi or English, as in other media, is likely to be minimal in what is turning out to be another powerful, yet local, electronic medium. In the long run, VCR may enforce a strong cultural base and identity for various linguistic and religious groups at the expense of national and secular stance of today.

Open University

India is inheritor to the gurukula system of education when the teacher and the taught lived together in ashrams. The pursuit of knowledge had a sense of mutual dedication. The notion of trusteeship was deeply rooted in the mind of the guru with regard to the chela; the pupil looked to the teacher with godly reverence. During the colonial era the British educational system got transplanted. Is thrust continues.

When politicians, bureaucrats and educationists travel through British, they get exposed to the successful Open University efforts of the BBC and many of them return with the conviction that openuniversities at the state and national levels be set up. Few of them, however, know of the philosophy behind the British efforts, the highly motivated students it attracts and the multi-media inputs into the exercise. What has impressed them is the television component. The argument in favour is that universities of the air can conquer distances and vast multitudes, and with the satellite communication facilities of India, there is a ready made delivery system. On paper the idea opens up visions of equality of

opportunities for higher education. Enthusiasts dream of the possibility as an alternative even to the formal system. A lack of appreciation of what is involved is apparent when one Education Minister wants his open university for post-graduate and research purposes, while his counterpart in a neighbouring state wants it for undergraduate teaching. Others say that ideally an open university should concentrate on continuing professional education rather than on general education at the higher level. Yet others are for nonformal and continuing education.

The Andhra Pradesh Open University, the only one of its kind in the country, established in 1982, is yet to prove the special contributions it is capable of. Television still remains to be exploited for its use. In the meanwhile, the Indira Candhi Open University is in the making as a federal institution which, among other things, will be a dispenser of courses as well as resource material for other open universities.

Television for better instruction has been attempted by the U.G.C. for its programmes. The telecasts are at inconvenient timings for college and university audiences. Evaluations show that few students get to watch it. The one-hour programme, made usually of three items, does not turn out to be a cohesive unit, nor does their week-long or month-long chains. Many of them come from abroad, from countries as varied as USSR and Australia; some from the BBC and US sources; yet others, poorly produced within the country. All these are in English and the different kinds of pronunciation do not always turn out to be the most meaningful even to educated viewers. Their cultural configurations are another limiting factor.

In a situation where some of the villages are yet to have primary schools and when earlier media such as print, film and radio have not been put to effective educational purposes, one has to be sceptical about the promises of TV

use of assorted kinds for the wide spectrum of instructional challenges. There is apparent haste on climbing the bandwagon of newness, without innovation.

Media Policy

Like most countries, India does not have a communication policy reduced to writing. This has advantages because the government in power will have elbow root to act as it wishes, and when issues crop up. In the context of policy debates the words "media," "communication" and "information" get used interchangeably. The Indian situation with regard to organised media is that, while the press and cinema are in private hands, radio and TV are under the central Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. So, the "policy" perceptions vary.

Addressing the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference in Delhi, April 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi remarked on the lack of a media policy thus: "I think the real reason is that the government as such has never understood the role media is playing. The government has never tried to look at it deeply enough to see how the media's role can be make more positive without interfering in the functioning of the media." More recently, in March 1986, the President of the Indian Federation of Working Journalists, said in Bangalore that any talk of a national media policy is antithetical the notion of the freedom of the press. Obviously, this is a confounding issue.

Since Indian independence a variety of committees and commissions have looked into problems of the media, resulting in a vast array of recommendations. There have been norms and principles guiding and controlling media operations. ARticle No. 19 of the Indian Constitution has implications; so also the State control on monopoly of broadcasting and film censorship as mentioned in List-A, Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. There are guide lines contained in various legislation. All these form basis of day to day media functioning. Development orientation, social responsibility and cultural preservation are some of the

major concerns.

Autonomy for radio and television is a much articulated issue. Those not in favour of the idea fear that advancement in comsat would not have been possible under private auspices and that if broadcasting goes private, it would be taken over by the money bags at the expense of larger social interest. There have been demands by states for a second channel. A second Delhi channel has not been a conspicuous sccess. Surveys tell that its viewership is small compared to the main channel.

Demands for the creation of a National Communication Policy Council which could be all-embracing are now being made. Such a council could look into the economic, socio-cultural, legal, political, educational, linguistic, technological, research, manpower and other aspects.

Kerala

The small state of Kerala can be taken a an interesting case study in fusing native ingenuity with communication technology. The state has many peculiarities about itself. It is the most cosmopolitan of Indian states: Christians - 21%; Muslims - 19%; and the rest, assorted Hindu communities such as Nairs (16%) and Ezhavas (25%). It claims apostlic Christianity, as St. Thomas is believed to have started the religion there in 52 A.D. Islam spread to Kerala's west coast as it was making its beginnings in the Middle East. Jews had preceded Islam and Christianity to the Malabar Coast, even before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

There are five state universities and 150 colleges, a college within almost ten miles of every home. The number of schools is over 12,000. In 1957, the state voted communists to power, and in 1959, established the world record of electing them out.

Kerala is the success story in family planning. The decennial population growth rate, 1971-81, is only 19% compared to 24.76 (1951-610 and contrasted with

the national 24.75% (which is no improvement on the 1961-71 figure of 24.8%). The significance of 19% stands out when the expected growth rate for the nation as a whole for 2,000 A.D. is a modest 21%. The life expectancy of a Keralite is around 65 years, not far behind some of the developed countries. Kerala had a matriarchal system which still endures in some areas. Women are in a minority, compared to the rest of India.

As for communication facilities, they are better dispersed across the population than in any other part of India. With regard to numbers, it suffices to say that over 6% of radio receivers in the nation and more than 10% of daily newspapers are in Kerala serving 3.73% of the nation's population climbing towards 800 million. An average of 100 feature films were annually produced in Malayalam during the past 15 years (nationally, some 800, during 1985). One-tenth of India's cinema theatres is in Kerala. Kerala leads per capita in television ownership. Nearly 500,000 from the state are in Gulf countries, English-speaking nations of north East and West Africa, England, Canada, U.S.A. and elsewhere. Thousands of Kerala nurses are in New York City hospitals alone. There is no Indian state with better transportation facilities, be it road, railroad or airlines. These lead not only to internal mobility but also to national and international mobility which all end up in a rewarding amalgam of communication. Kerala has of fifth of India's waterways. There is hardly a village more than 1 miles from a motorable road. The entire state is electrified.

In such a state, where political communication has had many original contributions through songs and stage, through writings on the wall and home visits, through grassroots party organisation and -- then of and Christain concern about one's neighbours-- certain effective, indigenous communication efforts are being tried. We may want to have a glimpse of five of them: SPCS,

FIB, KSSP, KANFED and KGS.

The Sahitya Pravartaka Co-operative Society (SPCS), a co-operative of the literary group, came into being as early as 1945. Its two objectives were safeguarding the rights of authors and making available to people books cheap. Its first book appeared on December 15, 1945. Since then, this venture has progressed rapidly. Up to the middle of 1985, more than 4,000 titles have been brought out. The SPCS has three wings: for publication, sales and printing. The National Book STall (NBS), which is the sales wing of the society, has a network of book stores in every district of the state: it has agents in all important urban centres of the country. It pays a royalty ranging from 20% to 30%, compared to the market rate of 5-12%. Its instalment, book shelf, consumer card, monthly prize and other schemes have encouraged readers to build up their own libraries. A library in every home seems to be its long term goal.

The Farm Information Bureau (FIB), though formally organised only in 1969, had its origin in 1957, when the agricultural information service of the state started the Kerala Karshakan (Kerala Farmer) as a monthly. Farming was then its only interest, but today it is the highest circulated rural-interest fortnightly. Since 1975 the FIB has actively been working with the leading Malayalam press and some 16 dailies have pages devoted at least once a week devoted entirely to agricultural and allied items. It feeds daily the A.I.R. with village oriented programmes. In a state where there is little of urban-rural dichotomy, where one village is contiguous with another and tough competition is a way of life, the flow of information is sought after. Thus the FIB currently has film and exhibition units as well, dealing with a variety of interesting subjects to a wide section of the population. It offers also photographs, illustrations and other graphic materials. Another rewarding experiment of the FIB, going back to 1974, is the Farm Book Corner (FBC) programme whereby rural libraries are

encouraged to have book corners specialising in rural information. This was started with 50 libraries and they have now spilled over to more than 2,000. Books for the FBC are offered at a special discount. Costs are equally shared along the FIB, Kerala Language Institute and rural libraries.

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), Kerala Science Literature Group, is an effort in creating a scientific tempo, its slogan being "Science for Social Revolution." The forerunner of the KSSP was the Sastra Sahitya Samithi, Science Literacy Front, founded in 1957, as a voluntary organisation by a handful of popular science writers and intellectuals. The KSSP was reorganised later, in 1967, with quire a different vision and mission. Its new constitution envisaged it to be a complete mass movement, and membership was open to everyone who believed in the significant role science has to play in moulding the lives of people and in taking science to the masses for developing a scientific attitude. From the Samithi through the Parishad, it is over a quarter century and the movement has attracted both the intelligentsia and the masses. Its messages hit the urban college and rural library alike. The former Science Writers's Club has blossomed into an organisation of science popularisers, publishers and ideologues with a commitment to use the tools of science and technology to effect social change. It is the only voluntary organisation in the country bringing out in any regional language five exclusive science publications for different levels of readers ranging from children to the university students and the more educated. The whole philosophy pervading is that it is a missionary venture and not a money spinning enterprise. Its School for Technicians and Artisans (START) brings together artisans and technicians under the Parishad umbrella. Short term courses are conducted for those varying from rubber technicians to electrical wiremen, from press workers to housewives (for home science and food technology). A regular chair of activities in the nature of correspondence courses,

exhibitions, discussions, film shows, talks, seminars and workshops is arranged round the year for specific audiences. More importantly, a continuous programme of critical analysis and evaluation of what is going on is attempted.

The Kerala Association for Nonformal Education and Development (KANFED) is the fourth in this chain of innovative communication efforts. This was set up in June 1977 with such objects as (1) Development of masses in education, technological and economic fields; (2) Spreading of nonformal education; (3) Establishing institutes, centres and publishing houses which help to eradicate illiteracy; and (4) Executing continuation education programmes, postal education and researches. The usual methods attempted for achieving these goals are camps, discussions, seminars and research work. Books, essays, magazines, newspapers and pamphlets are the main media being used. KANFED has so far brought out nearly 200 books for neo-literates. Another 500 titles, with emphasis on such subjects as law and order, industrial development, democracy, health and savings are on the anvil. Other publications include primers for use in adult education centres, guidelines, workbooks and charts. KANFED had several literacy centres spread all over Kerala. Priority of their activities is given to women, to low caste and tribal people, and coastal regions. Public support for its activities come in the form of locals putting up sheds for village classrooms; some who cannot help otherwise have donated the monthly honorarium for those working for the various centres. Hundreds of these centres are linked with small scale industries and village units throughout the state.

The Kerala Granthasala Sangham (KGS) is an association of rural libraries. It was formed as far back as 1945 with 45 libraries as members. Through dynamic pioneering efforts for fostering the growth of libraries in villages and for promoting rural reading habits, the KCS was able to build during the past four decades a network of over 4,000 libraries through out of state. These are foci

of socio-cultural and literary activities. They have emerged as powerful communication hubs as well. Each of these has 3,000-4,000 books; They provide newspapers and magazines also. In 1980, it was estimated that some 25 million books were borrowed from them at nominal fees. Most of these libraries maintain radios; some of them sponsor film shows. As mentioned earlier, over half of them have Farm Book Corners stocked with titles dealing exclusively with rural interests. Where such FBCs are organised, extension staff of agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, etc. help the libraries to conduct discussions on matters of localised concerns. Some of the libraries have been supplied with plant protection equipment at reduced rates. The FBCs have prompted seeking assistance for soil testing and veternary support, via mobile units. Before long, community TV sets will begin to trickle into come of these voluntary and autonomous reading and listening centres.

What is apparent from the above is that without being bogged down with technical jargon such as multi-media approach, appropriate technology, etc. Kerala has been on an organised communication march for many decades, unsung and undetected by fly-by-night experts. The agencies cited above have been engaged in an enormous, mainly voluntary, adventure of effective communication with Kerala masses: Work-of mouth, face-to-face, interpersonal. There has so far been little of "mass" media mystification about this process. Not much formal synchronisation exists among the five organisations. However, their interests generally overlap: so also their audiences. For over half a century, both capitalist and socialist communication patterns have influenced Kerala's social communication. Some kind of rhythism evolving from this hybridisation, unlike the rest of India. As television is a recent intruder to the scene, one has to wait and see as to what kind of pulls arm pushes this medium will cause to the communication dynamics of this literate, cosmopolitan and mobile people.

One day and this Kerala narration by citing two recent "mass" communication events without so-called mass mediation. This writer happened to be in Kerala, early February 1986, when the Pope and the ARch Bishop of Caterbury visited there. Both were not radio or television events in the sense they were not on live coverage. It was estimated that the Pope was personally seen and listened to by one out of every five Keralites. AT each of the four towns -- Cochin, Kottayam, Trichur and Trivandrum -- he addressed public meetings, the average crowed was half-a-million each. Hundreds of thousands of others saw him as he rode to and from the places of these meetings.

The main Kerala itinerary of the ARch Bishop was to address what is know in south India as the annual Maramon Convention arranged on the banks of river Pampa by the Mar Thoma Church. This convention, now considered the largest gathering of this type in the world, is a week-long affair with both morning and evening sessions. It attracts usually some 50,000 people for each session. Speeches delivered in English get translated into local Malayalam and relayed through the public address system. Radio and TV do not intervene in these religious discourses.

Thus the two examples also show that the state is prone t a variety of non-mass mediated communication efforts awaiting scholarly attention and interpretation.

Discussion:

Many of the organised communication efforts in less developed countries have been hardware-inspited software operations, delivered by elites to the so-called uneducated. By virtue of their inheritance, nature and technology, and the limitations in a two-way communication loop, mass media generally cater to an undifferentiated audience. Admittedly, communication revolution has transformed the social and technological fabric of human relationship. But, have these been

in desired directions?

Where dedicated social animators are involved, as in the case of Kerala agencies, there appears to be some kind of functional democratisation of communication. This has yielded circular flows rather than one-way flows, and has encouraged dialogues and exchanges that are usually missing in the urban-rural dichotomy of most BDCs. The diffusion of knowledge has been easier in Kerala: answering the complex question of access, control, costs, gatekeeping, etc.

Here is a society of oral traditions, getting interlaced with the postal system, press, film and radio (and more recently with TV). where masses actively participate in political meetings, religious conventions, boat races, fairs and festivals -- where also loudspeakers are turning into more of noise pollutants than aid to reach wider audiences.

What is euphemistically called "mass" communication in the Indian context is often class communication. The Kerala examples are decentralised and participatory communication even when modern means of communication have been resorted to : communication packages attempted in the natural and vibrant languages of the rather than pedantic and elitistic. The five Kerala agencies recognise the close relationship between culture of the masses and communication, and their mutually reinforcing capabilities. Oral tradition runs parallel to literary tradition here. Contemporary messages are transmitted through means both modern and traditional. There is a great explosion of knowledge all around that remains to be monitored and conveyed to those who need it in a manner they can understand and act upon and, thus, ultimately influence their life styles.

What the Kerala story has tried highlight is that communication for development has allotropic forms. Mass media are only one among the many; voluntary agencies are another. The debate is not one of "either/or". There has

been too much mystification elsewhere of communication gimmickry. Alternatives are possible. The communicator has rather to get down on his knees to the concerned audiences and stop looking down upon them form Himalayan heights. He should not be in the futile exercise of gathering kudos from his peer group, national and international.

Different religions, political ideologies, sub-cultures, levels of socio-economic growth and many other elements of contrasts -- that is the lot of Kerala. All the same, it has a growing ethos of its own, a strong value system, a sense of collective welfare, a notion of belonging. The fuel for development has got "pulled" into this society on the move, not "pushed" by someone out there. The Kerala experiments are a case of need inducing innovation. The communication amalgam of Kerala cannot be reproduced elsewhere, but a knowledge of how the state ticks may open up options for societies fashioned otherwise. For, culture-dependent innovative capacity is the hardest thing to transfer.

Concluding Remarks

Technological possibility tickles scientists. This creates resonance in potential user agencies. Platitudes spew. Few dare to warn that communication technological feasibility is neither the index of success not an undisguised blessing. Rural people seem to be more sensitive to this than urbanites.

The faith in the curative and rejuvenating propensities of television was reflected at an elite Delhi seminar on "Software Objectives of Television" organised as early as February 16-18, 1973: "Television must be utilised in the development process as an instrument of social change and national cohesion unhesitatingly upholding progressive values, and involving the community in a free dialogue. Indian television has to shun the elitist approach and consumer value systems and evolve a truly national model. Television as a support to

better education should assist the teacher effectively. It should cater to both in-school and out-of-school education." A plethora of "shoulds" for which little justification, indigenous or international, existed. Pious wishes of this kind had preceded the expectations of SITE. Findings from it had little impact on decision makers. True: problems of modernisation, national cohesion and education are there, and they need to be solved. However, as a change of pillow is no cure for migrane, shift to newer communication technologues -- photo composition for the press, colour TV, satcom, etc. -- alone is poor panacea for age-old national illnesses.

The challenge of instrumental users of media is to arrive at the right communication mix and to maintain the proper balance between facilities that are already operative in a given culture and those that are becoming increasingly available to the society. The new communication environment, unlike in the past, is a creation of political will, and not because of colonial reasons or as an outcome of stages of development. Importation of technology has to be purpose-oriented, considering the large national investments.

Technologies bring about changes in society (not necessarily intended) and, therefore, policy planning calls for comprehensive coverage of both hardware and software. It demands an understanding of what traditional channels and modern media have done in the past. The question is not only one of setting up newer facilities and acquiring ability to operate them but also one of appreciating the origins of communication technologies, their potential and limitations for effective social engineering. The act of picking up INSAT signals, amplifying them and rebroadcasting via LPTs is no great social "service" by itself to the communities covered.

Media, new and not so new, reflect largely the ethos of the ruling elites and their class whereby mass interests get diluted, distorted and ignored. India

is blessed not only with the strong centre at the expense of weak states by also by an increasingly strong metropolis-based media system at the risk of local facilities. This may be convenient and rewarding for the continued domination of the urban-based upper classes who enjoy setting up transmitters rather than mini studios.

Instead of culture-specific and need-based communication, as being tried in Kerala, we have technology-dictated communication efforts, like the UGC telecasts. Before high powered technology descended, there existed, however, conventional wisdom as exploited by a Sankaracharya or Gandhiji.

The distance between "professed"--improving the quality of life of Indian masses-- and "practised" communication culture at present, be it the private press or the public broadcasting, is glaring enough even for the blind to recognise. Who owns the media is not all that important as long as media are run professionally and with social responsibility. Demands of technological revolution and its capacity to deliver goods remain to be founded on more exacting professional requirements, and on policy planning. These have to be rooted on an understanding of the sociology of communication a culture of competence, plus on the political will for use of communications for larger social good.